

The Research Brief



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Students Develop an Attitude of Reflection and Thoughtfulness about Professional Growth and Instruction

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"Study without reflection is a waste of time." -Confucius

Question How will self reflection increase students' ability to develop an attitude of reflection and thoughtfulness about professional growth and instruction?

Summary of Findings

Professional growth and instruction are best enhanced through a developed attitude of reflection and thoughtfulness. Dewey (1933), deemed reflection as the core of all learning experiences, which enable "us to act in a deliberate and intentional fashion ... [to] convert action that is merely ... blind and impulsive into intelligent action" (1933, p. 212). Professional growth is predicated on the thoughtfulness of reflection and not the experience itself. Self-reflection encourages informed decision making by being able to see things in a different light (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2005; O'Connor & Diggins 2002). Students develop attitudes of reflection and thoughtfulness about professional growth and instruction by reflecting on their performances in a learning experience and linking their experience to their learning. Disciplined contemplation helps students examine their learning experience and the impact it will have on their professional behavior. This type of thoughtfulness will enhance their development and professional growth. Through

self-reflection, educators are allowed to distance themselves from their thoughts and actions, make sense of how and why particular practices worked or did not work, and use new understandings of these processes to adapt practices to be more effective in the future (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2005).

Zeichner and Liston's Model of Reflective Teaching

In 1991 Zeichner and Liston discovered many of their students were unable to incorporate thoughtful reflection that transformed their instruction and professional development. They then structured what has become the Zeichner and Liston's Model of Reflective Teaching. The mode attempts to move these prospective teachers through the four levels of reflective thought (factual, procedural, justificatory, and critical) as they move through the program (Liston and Zeichner 1991).

Liston and Zeichner (1991) described the following four levels of reflection:

1. factual (reflection focused on routines and procedures of classroom teaching);
2. procedural (reflection centered on evaluation of teaching outcomes);
3. justificatory (reflection about rationales for teaching); and
4. Critical (reflection focused on critical examination of teaching as it impacts social justice and the pre-service teachers own professional development

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Brown and Irby Reflection Cycle

Brown and Irby (1996; 2001) determined that the ability to reflect and transform experiences to future actions was an issue for leadership candidates with whom they worked. The ability to reflect and transform is particularly important in the development of academic, evaluation, and professional development portfolios. To assist in reflection, they developed The Reflection Cycle in 1996. The first step is to select an artifact(s) most representative of the goals the individual is attempting to demonstrate. Second, describe the circumstances, situation, or event(s) related to the experience represented by the artifact. The third step is an analysis of the why and how of the experience and the relationship of the experience to issues, goals, and practice. The fourth step is to appraise, or self-assess as the individual interprets the event(s), evaluates the impact and appropriateness of his/her action(s) relating them back to personal beliefs and values. The fifth and final step holds the greatest opportunity for growth because the individual uses insights gained from the reflective process for the development of future plans to improve and transform practice.

Tying It All Together

In spite of the multicultural student population, the population of pre-service teachers is consistently becoming mono-cultural. One challenge for teacher preparation programs arising from the mismatch of teacher and student cultures is to facilitate intercultural sensitivity and learning among prospective teachers (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000). Teacher educators confront many obstacles in teaching critical reflection: Pre-service teachers view student diversity as a problem rather than a resource, have limited understanding of social factors that influence learning, and rarely understand how their own biases and perceptions influence their own teaching (Nagle, 2009). Cultural diversity covers many realms in our society. These realms include but are not limited to students with special needs, ESL students, and multicultural students. The challenge for many universities is how to equip pre-service teachers with the correct tools to educate all of the needs of their future diverse learners. One tool that pre-service teachers are equipped with is the ability to reflect thoughtfully regarding their professional growth. In addition, their reflection focuses on instruction and the impact it will have on

their future students. Critical reflection focuses on the implications of classroom practice for social justice and promotes reflection as a collaborative act (Nagle, 2009). Instituting thoughtful reflection encourages pre-service to look at the areas where they are lacking as a teacher and the individual needs of their future students. Reflection and reflectiveness seem to represent a foundational concept in higher education (Brockbank & McGill 1998). Professional growth and instruction will not occur unless a student is able to implement an intense self reflection. Developing reflectivity enables students to transition instruction from technical understanding to comprehending the big picture (Tama & Peterson, 1991).

Additional Resources

Reflective Teaching and Learning: (Dymoke, S. & Harrison, J., 2008)

This important resource gives pre-service teachers access to theories of reflective practices in teaching and learning and is complimented by a companion website with follow-up activities and example materials. Reflective teaching and learning is an excellent text for pre-service and beginning teachers. 'Reflective Teaching and Learning is an accessible guide for both student teachers and current practitioners to help them understand the components of the learning and teaching process...The accessible and easy-to-understand tone used by the authors enables a gentle yet thorough development for the student' (Dymoke, S. & Harrison, J., 2008)

Reflective Teaching and Learning Website: This website is a companion to the book Reflective Teaching and Learning. Each chapter has a link for pre-service and beginning teachers to access additional information pertaining to each chapter in the book. Additionally, you will find information regarding staff developments and learning activities that address the needs of diverse learners.

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